

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by SAGE Publications in *European Journal of Social Theory* on July 2015 (Issue published on August 2016). Available online:

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431015594443>

Work, recognition and subjectivity: Relocating the connection between work and social pathologies

Marco Angella

Paris Nanterre University, France

As from the thirties, the primary aim of the Frankfurt School critical theory was to understand why the exploitation produced by the capitalistic organization of labor did not lead to a revolution and a new social system. The innovative elements introduced to address this issue, including analysis of the “culture industry”, the dialectical methodology and the interdisciplinary approach, greatly enhanced and extended the scope of the left-Hegelian tradition, and more generally the field of critical social theory. The concept of work was still an essential component – one among others, admittedly,

but perhaps the most important – of the dimensions needed to account for social processes of domination (*Herrschaft*) and alienation. Essential as it is, however, this concept had never been used to analyze the concrete reality of human interactions in the work process. Progressively, Horkheimer and Adorno abandoned the search in the dynamics of labor, or indeed in any human relationship or behavior for a *viable* way out of domination. Even Marcuse, whose critical approach was closer to contemporary social praxis, explained the processes of alienation and domination with abstracts categories (Renault, 2008), without adopting the perspective of the individuals concretely involved in the work processes.

Thus, in the first generation of Frankfurt School critical theorists, the concept of work remains too abstract to be used for a philosophical-sociological critique of the concrete dynamics of alienation and domination within work as an *activity*. Let us now briefly turn to Habermas, the most important philosopher of the second generation of Frankfurt School theorists. In his philosophy, the concept of work clearly loses the importance previously attributed to it. There is no doubt that Habermas' introduction of the concept of *differentiated* rationality enriched critical social theory, but it is of little help in forging a concrete critique of work alienation and its consequences for ethical and political life. The sphere of “instrumental rationality” can be criticized only indirectly, insofar as it encroaches upon the sphere of “communicative action”. The critique is defensive and external: it does not affect the immanent developing of the

sphere of instrumental rationality, because the only criterion to evaluate this kind of rationality is its efficiency.

In the field of critical social theory, neither the first nor the second generation of the Frankfurt School critical theorists has the right tools to formulate an incisive critique of the concrete processes of work alienation and reification. By contrast, the third generation seems to reconsider work as an essential component, not only because it can be alienated/alienating, but also because it is a vehicle of emancipatory demands. In what follows, I will present a succinct analysis of Axel Honneth's thought on the concept of work and propose an approach attributing it with a more substantial role in social theory. To this end I will embark upon a reappraisal of the importance of the material and psychological dimensions of the subject's interactions at work. My aim is to demonstrate that the normative demands associable with these dimensions are, like the normative demands of recognition, immanent and relatively universal. In other words, I will argue that the normative ideals that can be associated with one's bodily and psychic life (at work and beyond) are not necessarily, and not all, utopian in the negative sense (abstract and unrealistic). If this proves to be true, then it will have important consequences for those who are interested in the kind of critical social theory Axel Honneth is engaged in. They could take these normative demands of emancipation as reference in further developing analysis of the sociological, political and moral implications of the transition from "Fordist" to "Post-Fordist" organization of labor.

Axel Honneth's concept of work

In a recent article on the role of recognition in the social division of labor (Honneth, 2010)¹, Honneth conceives of work as firm vehicle of individual and collective striving for emancipation. His strategy is to associate mutual recognition – along with its normative expectations of social emancipation – with the structure of labor as a system that implies and allows for social reproduction. By working, individuals contribute not only to the material reproduction of their society, but also to the formation of their own identity, the social division of labor being the core of one of the three spheres of recognition². From this point of view, the concept of work has a twofold value: insofar as it makes social reproduction possible, it is the root of our “common good”, and insofar as it defines one of the dimensions of recognition – that of esteem –, it also serves as root of the individual’s identity.

Let us now consider how the construct of a vehicle of social and normative progress enters into this concept of work. Honneth contends that, along with the development of the social division of labor, recognition develops relations of solidarity. By participating, through the market, in the constitution and reproduction of their “common good”, individuals *perceive themselves as mutually related* (Honneth, 2010: 234)³. It is the interweaving of mutual recognition and the labor market that leads to this kind of self-comprehension. Individual and collective aims converge through

recognition; being able to contribute to the common good means contributing to one's own well-being and autonomy – and vice-versa. From Honneth's perspective, this means that it is not only legitimate but also imperative (from a normative point of view) to protest when the existing social and working conditions do not allow people to feel appreciated for their contribution to the development of their community. Indeed, from the very outset, the key idea in Honneth is that only when individuals, tacitly at least, give their (normative) “consent” to the relations of domination related to the market, can they legitimately protest against them (Honneth, 1991). This, however, is precisely what they do, in that they are not merely dominated through the market but, by participating in it, they actively contribute to the formation of their own identity (Honneth, 2010). Disrespect (*Missachtung*) in the sphere of the market undermines this identity. Individuals need integrity of personal identity to participate freely and fully in their social activities. In order to reestablish this integrity, they are compelled to struggle for recognition. From an historical point of view, this struggle for recognition delineates a form of social progress we can interpret as a process of (inter)subjective emancipation (Honneth, 1995)⁴. With normative reconstruction of the intersubjective expectations regarding the market sphere we can measure the scope of both social progress and regression within it (Honneth, 2014).

This conception of work is decidedly cogent in that it allows us to determine the links between individuals striving for emancipation and objective social dynamics

through the interconnectability of the following three instances:

1) Firstly, the connection between emancipatory demands and work is based on the normative expectation of recognition and depends on the consideration (esteem) we receive for our own contribution, as cooperating workers, to the common good. Despite social inequality and differences in the value attributed to particular lines of work, the social division of labor organizes work in a way that theoretically allows every individual to feel recognized for his or her contribution (Honneth, 1995: 126–130, 179). As noted above, if individuals are denied due recognition (disrespect, *Missachtung*) for this contribution, they are not only entitled to protest, but they are also (normatively) *compelled* to struggle in order to reestablish recognition⁵. Honneth's main contention is that this struggle leads to the institutionalization of a *surplus* of recognition (i.e. to an emancipation that, in the case of work, means a more differentiated, extended and fair evaluation of people's contribution to the common good)⁶.

2) Secondly, the connection between emancipatory demands and work is immanently included in the process of social reproduction. It is true that work – which is the basis of this reproduction – is managed with codified rules that guarantee its effective performance. However, for Honneth, the market itself is based on mutual recognition. In other words, even though work responds to an instrumental rationality, the social division of labor is rooted in the implicit norms of recognition that are also responsible for the individuation and socialization of the subject⁷. The social division of

labor is always rooted in our ethical life. Thus, through the division of labor, the striving for emancipation on the part of the individuals is involved in the reproduction of society⁸.

3) Thirdly, through this involvement with social reproduction, the concept of emancipation surpasses the limits of what would otherwise remain mere individual desires and takes on an objective and universal dimension.

Starting from this basis, Honneth is able to criticize the theoretical approaches that ground their critique of work on either an aesthetic paradigm or the interactive conception typical of craftwork⁹. Such approaches have not only become obsolete in modern organization of labor, but refer to an ideal of work that is not interpreted as something involved in the process of social reproduction. Enjoying an aesthetic, playful or rich interaction with the object of our work does not affect the way our society is able to renew itself: hence such ideals can only persist within strictly circumscribed areas, having no place in a *universal and immanent* critique. Certainly, the qualitative, interactive, aesthetic and manual aspects of work must still exist, and even retain a certain importance, but the material development of the society can proceed without them.

Since, for Honneth, recognition forms the basis of the social division of labor in the era of the capitalist market, only the normative ideals that constitute expression of mutual recognition are vitally linked with social reproduction. Through mutual

recognition, these ideals acquire an emancipatory potential that is not only normative, but also, and at the same time, immanent and universal. On the contrary, the manual, bodily, aesthetic, material and psychological interactions, insofar as they are not involved in the formation of the norms of recognition, have no claim to any such potentiality. Even if the normative ideals associated with these interactions were present, their realization, if any, would be nothing more than expression of a mere subjective wish.

We are now able to draw some conclusions from this brief analysis of the role of work in Honneth's recent re-elaboration of the concept. Even though it conceptualizes work as a possible vehicle of social and normative evolution, the theory of recognition seems to underestimate the importance of material interactions within it (Deranty, 2007). Conversely, my hypothesis is that these interactions, as well as the psychic dimension implied in the work process, are among the ways to enrich, both normatively and phenomenologically, the concepts of alienation and (the striving for) emancipation within the sphere of work and beyond. Taking into account the bodily (physical and psychological) dimension of work does not imply abandoning a normative theory, nor bowing to an excessively relativistic approach (i.e. abandoning two of the most important premises of Honneth's theory). In the following pages, I will argue how it can legitimately claim a much more essential position from the perspective of critical social

theory along the lines of the Frankfurt School.

Body and work. Beyond recognition

To ensure that theory does not diverge from the actual development of social reproduction we have to assume the same criteria of immanence and universality found in Honneth's conception of work¹⁰. According to the latter, recognition in the sphere of work is essential both for the constitution of the subject's identity and for social reproduction. In turn, a model of critical theory that attempts to integrate bodily, psychic and material interactions has to show that they are necessary both to the subject's formation and to the reproduction of society. In doing so, this model aims to enhance the normative potential of the theory without losing the cogency of Honneth's critical social theory.

Material interactions and subject formation

The French work psychologist Christophe Dejours introduced the idea that not only sexuality – which was at the center of classical psychoanalytic theory – but also work are among the most important components in the formation of a subject's identity¹¹. Dejours conceptualizes the human psyche as the living *milieu* where a twofold exteriority meets. On one hand, the exteriority of the subject's own body, in the sense mainly of a sensitive, physical body; on the other hand, the exteriority of the reality of

work, essentially as material reality. The hypothesis is that the problems we encounter facing this material reality are able to recompose – through the “psychic work” of which dreams are a key example – the identity of the subject (Dejours, 2009, tome 1).

Dejours considers the “psychic work” (*Arbeit*) of the individual as an attempt to overcome his or her suffering in dealing with the material resistance of the reality of work (*poïesis*)¹². Through this psychical re-elaboration, subjectivity – i.e. the subject's ability to feel pleasure and create and discover new dimensions of his or her own sensibility – is enhanced. In other words, through engagement in this effort to tackle the “material” resistance of reality to our action – the adjective “material” referring precisely to this opposition of exteriority to our effort – subjectivity is able to enrich itself and flourish. What is interesting here is that, according to Dejours, these aspects are “in part at least, inaccessible by means other than work and the experience of what it is able to provide access”.¹³

While what one has inherited in one's past life (whatever this inheritance might be, cultural or inbred) severely limits this kind of progress, it is nevertheless still possible. Such progress can be achieved if the individual is able to overcome the difficulties of work, re-elaborate and sublimate them. This hinges mostly on elements that he or she cannot control, like the interactive processes that have led to his or her formation as from birth¹⁴. However, for Dejours, some leeway is open for the subject's evolution. In this case,

through the experience of work, the worker not only learns to know his or her limits and awkwardness, but also to extend the repertoire of emotional impressions and discover new virtuosities (...). Because it is also in this way that subjectivity grows and changes: by bodily recognition of the world and, through this recognition, by self-knowledge. To work is not only to produce but also to challenge one's own body, with the opportunity to become more sensitive than before, and thus to increase the capacity to experience pleasure. (Dejours, 2009, tome 1: 163)¹⁵

According to Dejours, the role of recognition in forming an individual's identity in the sphere of work¹⁶ has to be integrated with his or her capacity to address the myriad problems imposed by the material reality of work. Not only accidents and impediments, but also the normal activity of achieving a goal in a workplace requires the effort to fight a material resistance. Mutual recognition is rooted in this material substrate of resistance. Due to our struggle against it, this substrate is directly involved, through our psychical re-elaboration (*Arbeit*) of the effort, in the constitution of our subjectivity. Therefore, the (trans)formation of our subjectivity partially depends on the material activity of work¹⁷. We form our subjectivity and its ability to feel pleasure through the interactions with family and friends during childhood. Through the endurance of tackling the reality of work and the intra-psychic re-elaboration of the suffering that it implies, the subject has a chance to sublimate this suffering into pleasure. The material interactions in the workplace give us a "second chance" to overcome our blockages and transform our subjectivity by enhancing its capacity to feel pleasure and thrive¹⁸. From this point of view the purpose of critical social theory should be to illustrate whether or

not the actual organization of labor facilitates the daily efforts of individuals to overcome the problems they come up against while dealing with the reality of work.

Material interactions and social reproduction

With this approach, Dejours opens the way to interpretation of the material and bodily aspects of work interactions as a central dimension in the subject's constitution. Thus, we are able to consider this dimension as one of the essential components in the development of the social pathologies related to work. Neglect of it often has negative effects on the subject's development and flourishing. Can the same also be said for social reproduction? Only by demonstrating that material interactions in the workplace are essential both for the subject's formation and for social reproduction can we affirm the immanence *and* universality of the normative demands related to these interactions. This is essential if we mean to maintain the accuracy and strengths of Honneth's social theory. Certainly, these demands deserve attention and are worthy of consideration even though they remain subjective demands, depending on the individual's constitution. And yet the model of critical social theory we are concerned with would have a stronger potential if we were able to connect these subjective aspects with the objective development of our societies.

Let us now consider one of the major objections that can be raised against this conception of work. The fact is, we always encounter problems and impediments in our

daily life, and we can call this reality a “material” reality insofar as it presents some resistance to our achieving our goals. What, then, is the specificity of the “material reality” at work? Why should the resistance of the reality of work be different from the material reality we face every day? How can the work activity be distinguished from other activities?

In order to answer these questions we have to look deeper into the concept of work as used in the psychodynamics of work. In this discipline, work is not primarily “the wage relation or employment”. Although it is an activity that produces “values or wealth” and, for this reason “it is the stake of domination relationships” (Il est l'enjeu de rapports de domination) (Dejours: 2009, tome 1: 185), work “cannot be reduced to its social dimensions: the social relations surrounding it, relations between the workers, or power relations”. These dimensions have an essential role in defining the real organization of work (Dejours 2011a: 219-221) ¹⁹ . However, what primarily characterizes work is the fact that working implies being able to find a way to perform what the work organization’s rules and directives require, and this always calls for strategies that allow the individual to depart from these same rules and directives. The human and non-human reality – made up not only of inanimate material but also of colleagues, whether subordinate or senior – that the individuals deal with at work is what stands between the given organization of the work tasks and their actual realization. As an activity that bridges “the gap between the prescriptive” and the

“concrete reality” of its performance, work is both a social relationship and a technical, bodily interaction with the environment.

Work, for Dejours,

is what is implied, in human terms, by the fact of working: gestures, know-how, the involvement of the body and the intelligence, the ability to analyze, interpret, and react to situations. It is the power to feel, to think, and to invent. In other words, for the clinician, work is not above all the wage relation or employment but ‘working’, which is to say, the way the personality is involved in confronting a task that is subject to constraints (material and social). What emerges as the main feature of ‘working’ (for the clinician once again) is that, even when the work is well conceived, even when the organization of work is rigorous, even when the instructions and procedures are clear, it is impossible to achieve quality if the orders are scrupulously respected. Indeed, ordinary work situations are rife with unexpected events, breakdowns, incidents, operational anomalies, organizational inconsistency and things that are simply impossible to predict, arising from the materials, tools, and machines as well as from other workers, colleagues, bosses, subordinates, the team, the chain of authority, the clients, and so on. In short, there is no such thing as purely mechanical work. This means that there is always a gap between the prescriptive and the concrete reality of the situation. This gap is found at all levels of analysis between task and activity, or between the formal and informal organization of work. Working thus means bridging the gap between prescriptive and concrete reality. However, what is needed in order to do so cannot be determined in advance; the path to be navigated between the prescriptive and the real must constantly be invented or rediscovered by the subject who is working. Thus, for the clinician, work is defined as what the subjects must add to the orders so as to reach the objectives assigned to them, or alternately, what they must add of themselves in order to deal with what does not function when

they limit themselves to a scrupulous execution of orders. (2007: 72; see also 2009, tome 2: 20-21)

One may contend that not only work but also normal everyday life is always subject to norms, constraints and rules that inhibit our actions: they offer resistance to us, and we have to tackle this resistance. From the perspective adopted in this article, however, the specificity of work lies within the objective work needed for social reproduction and the subjective activity of working, which implies engagement of subjectivity (bodily and psychic) well beyond working hours. What Dejours calls *le travail vivant*, “working” as an activity, is the creative process that, addressing the prescriptions for work, overcomes the problems entailed with the practical implementation of these prescriptions. Without this kind of invisible work, which lies behind the codified rules, “exceeds any limit assigned to working hours” and mobilizes “the whole of the personality” (Dejours, 2007: 77)²⁰, the objective working process may not be able to function properly and its effectiveness, as well as its quality, may suffer. Without the *travail vivant*, for Dejours, no labor organization could be viable. If the workers “strictly adhere” to the codified norms, if they “meet exactly the commands, in absolute obedience”, then “it is a disaster” and “nothing works, the production fails. No company, no workshop works if the operators become obedient” (2009, tome 1: 26)²¹.

If companies and workshops achieve their productive goals, it is because the invisible working activity continues behind the production processes, even though their formal organization tends to prevent it. However, the subsequent social and technical

pressure – that is, the pressure of the prescribed organization of work – on the creativity and autonomy of the subjects has at least two negative and related effects: it is a source of suffering for the subject and consequently lowers the quality of work. To put it in plain terms: the social organization of work can facilitate either the realization of the individual's creativity, expression, cooperation and autonomy, and the psychic re-elaboration of the challenges he or she encounters tackling the realities of work, thus enhancing the individuals' own subjectivity *and* the quality of production – or, vice versa, it can hinder these processes.

On this basis we are able to find the relation we have been looking for. The development of subjectivity can be associated with social reproduction. By the same means by which subjects seek to overcome difficulties, to sublimate suffering and enhance their subjectivity – i.e. by the *travail vivant* (*working*) and the psychic work (*Arbeit*) related to it – the reproduction of society (social organized work, *poïesis*) continues in quality and does not risk blockage or deterioration. Subjectivity and work are to a certain extent complementary: social reproduction hinges partly on an activity that, at the same time, enhances the subject's identity. This enhancement is achieved not only at the level of individual consideration for his or her contribution to the common good, as in Honenst's theory, but also at the level of the sensibility, of the aesthetic pleasure experienced and, more generally, at the level of interactive exchanges with the human and non-human environment in the workplace and beyond.

Conclusions

On these bases, it is possible to re-evaluate the social pathologies concerning work making reference to the concept of alienation (Haber 2007; Renault 2006). Suffering in the workplace becomes a pathology when the objective conditions of the organization of work obstruct a living and interactive exchange with the concrete realities of the working environment. This may come about, for instance, by separating workers, excluding them from cooperative activity, overloading them with tasks, requiring of them excess in performance and competitiveness, or expecting them to tackle tasks for which the material and organizational conditions are inappropriate. In these cases, the risk is that the subjects may concentrate all their efforts on defenses against suffering, adopting a rigid behavior, unable to overcome the difficulties that may occur, possibly leading to regression in subjectivity, acceptance of domination, insensitivity to his or her own suffering as well as others', violence (both at work and beyond) (Dejours 2011b, 1998; Deranty 2010: 186–190, 213–216), reduced vitality, a sense of humiliation and of inability to adapt, and dynamics that may exceptionally lead to suicide (Bègue and Dejours, 2009).

Similarly, the concept of emancipation increases in critical value by integrating those material and bodily dimensions that remain partially in the shade in Honneth's theory. According to Dejours, the move towards a context in which individuals can

exercise their creativity in the workplace and which, consequently, enhances their subjectivity, i.e. “emancipation” in and through work, depends on the establishment of a favorable and supporting living-work environment. It hinges on political decisions (Dejours, 2009, tome 2: 178, 198–208)²² to implement measures in this direction. However, politicians hardly seem likely to adopt such measures in the contemporary neoliberal context, although we can demonstrate, as does Dejours, that unsatisfactory conditions can lead to deterioration in the quality of work.

Workers can find the power to play an important role in political policy only if they have sufficient scope to engage and cooperate with one another. But it is precisely this kind of cooperative scope – essential to establish a *travail vivant*-friendly environment – which they lack in the contemporary organization of work. On the basis of this diagnosis, critical social theory following in the lines of the Frankfurt School should analyze the pathologies of work and propose alternative models to organize it in accord with social practices²³. We can justify this approach by showing how the suffering caused by inappropriate work organization – which is unacceptable in itself, raising severe moral concerns – is counterproductive both in the production process (material reproduction) and beyond it. By pushing the performance and competitiveness ideal to the extreme, post-Fordist work organization negatively affects the well-being of the people who work *and* the quality of the social reproduction *as a whole* (Deranty 2008). The mediation between these two aspects lies in the concept of subjectivity we can infer

from Dejours' theory. The subject's ability to overcome suffering and sublimate it constitutes the connection between the effects of work on subjectivity and the political, ethical and social consequences of work organization. By facilitating the formation of subjective defenses against suffering, the post-Fordist organization of work creates “massive amounts of anxiety” and destroys not only “individuals lives” but also “social bonds and communities”. (Deranty, 2008: 457, 444)

However, recognition is not the only element at stake in these harmful effects of work on individual and collective life. Mutual recognition is rooted in basic layers of bodily and psychical interactions. Through the depletion of subjectivity, the ability of the subject to activate the psychic investment in the human and non-human environment and interact within it positively is also affected. The sphere of work is not isolated from the other spheres of subjective and social life. The alienating processes cannot be separated from one another: deleterious organization of work has a negative effect on the other spheres of human interaction and vice versa²⁴. Thus, from the perspective of this paper, improved cooperation amongst workers and the normative demands that could ensue are based on recognition of the worker's contribution to the common good – they are based on the impossibility, without the recognition of this contribution, to establish a positive relationship with oneself. Improved cooperation amongst workers and the related normative demands are also based, however, on the indispensable preconditions to establish living and interactive work activity. In other words, they

derive from the difficulty, without this kind of work activity, to establish rich and flourishing relationships with oneself, and indeed with the human and the non-human environment. What could lapse into crisis, and possibly call for a response that could be the start of collective action, is not only the intersubjectively formed identity of an individual, but also the subjectivity of an individual, the constituents of which are something more than mutual recognition.

Notes

¹ In this work, Honneth confirms and deepens his previous argumentation on the third sphere of recognition (esteem). See Honneth (1995, chapter 5). In doing so, he rejects what he himself had sustained in an early contribution on work, considering the latter as an activity where interactive and material interactions generate critical insight and the autonomy of the workers is essential. See Honneth (1980). For an analysis of the shift in Honneth's thoughts on work, see Smith (2009).

² According to *The struggle for recognition*, the identity of an individual takes shape within the spheres of Love, Right and Solidarity. The social division of labor is the core of the sphere of solidarity (Honneth, 2010, 1995: chapter 5)

³ Referring to Durkheim, Honneth affirms that "market-mediated relations give rise to social relations in which the members of society are able to form a particular, 'organic' form of solidarity, because the reciprocal recognition of their respective contributions to the common good gives them a sense of connectedness". Furthermore, referring to Hegel, Honneth argues that "in the system of market-mediated exchange, subjects mutually recognize each other as private autonomous beings that act for each other and thereby sustain their livelihood through the contribution of their labor to society", (Honneth, 2010: 230).

⁴ The concept of emancipation seems inappropriate in regard to Honneth's theory. Honneth does not provide a revolutionary account of work (and of praxis in general). Rather, he conceptualizes social evolution from *within* the development of the "structure of modern legal relations". (Honneth, 1995: 118) Furthermore, this evolution is a long and difficult process whose results are not guaranteed (Honneth, 1995: chapter 6 and 8). However, I think we are authorized to use this concept to the extent that 1) from an objective point of view, it is an open question as to whether the struggles for recognition will lead to just an internal evolution of already existent values and rights or to the shaping of a different social-economical organization and, 2) from the (inter)subjective point of view, it is possible to relate the struggle for recognition to enhancement of the subjects' ability to flourish. This *internal* (and *weaker*) concept of emancipation should be distinguished from the *external* (and *stronger*, revolutionary) one, which was the concept the first generation of the Frankfurt School would use. Social progress, for Honneth, begins from within a normatively legitimate social order. In this paper, I use the weaker concept of emancipation and aim to enhance it.

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- ⁵ Subjects are compelled to struggle because they need recognition in order to establish a good relationship with themselves. Of course, the immanent need for reaction does not necessarily imply that struggle will ensue. In this chapter, Honneth simply illustrates the psychological connection between the experience of being treated unjustly and the possibility for subjects to discover that this experience depends on (a denial of) recognition (Honneth, 1995: chapter 6).
- ⁶ For the notion of “surplus” of recognition, see Honneth (1995), Fraser and Honneth (2003). For a critique of the notion of surplus, see Angella (2012)
- ⁷ “The 'social order' of the market, as it is termed nowadays, thus encompasses not only positive legal regulations and principles that fix the conditions for the freedom to contract and engage in economic exchange, but also a series of unwritten, inexplicit norms and rules that implicitly determine – before any market-mediated transactions take place – how the value of certain goods is to be estimated and what should be legitimately respected in the exchange”. (Honneth, 2010: 232) Thus, even though the sphere of economics assumes autonomous identity, based on its own rules, it will always be founded on implicit moral norms.
- ⁸ The formation of emancipatory demands depends on recognition; recognition is the basis of the social division of labor; the division of labor is the root of social reproduction; thus the emancipatory demands are connected to social reproduction.
- ⁹ For Honneth, the “romanticized model of the craftsman and the aesthetic ideal of artistic production” stems from an age of capitalist development which still evidenced both the possibility of direct interaction with the object of work and command of the practical and theoretical knowledge leading the subject to develop some autonomy in the process of production. If, since then, they have taken on utopian characteristics, it is because they appeared to be incompatible with the tasks of social reproduction (Honneth, 2010: 225–229). For the importance of the craftsman model in the ancient and contemporary world, see Sennett (2008).
- ¹⁰ In this regard, although close to it, my endeavor departs from that of Jean-Philippe Deranty, who is developing a rich concept of work where the aspects of recognition are bound up with work as a subjective activity. Unlike Honneth, Deranty does not believe that in order to have normative value, subjective and material norms related to work must be universal. Rather, we have to distinguish between the fact that subjects at work need “a certain level” of autonomy (that is, they need to cooperate and express themselves in concrete work activity), and the idea that “the whole production process must be organized” to respond to such norms. This would be unrealistic. Deranty illustrates that “just because a claim cannot be maximally universalized does not necessarily make it normatively irrelevant” (Deranty, 2011). In agreement with this approach, I would like to go further. Through use of the same fundamentals, that is, the “psychodynamics of work”, one can relatively universalize the norms related to work *as a subjective and material activity* by illustrating that this kind of work is essential to social reproduction. Insofar as we are able to do this, these norms are neither unrealistic nor confined to the sphere of the subject's activity. They are immanent not only from a subjective perspective, but also from an objective one (i.e. from the perspective of the social reproduction the market is capable of). However, I do not think integrating this kind of bodily and psychical interactions into Honneth's theory is compatible with his intention to renew the paradigm of Critical Theory on the basis of recognition. In this regard, I interpret my attempt to reinforce the concept of alienation/emancipation at work as something that destabilizes the foundation of Honneth's theory of recognition.
- ¹¹ Works of Christophe Dejours in English can be found in Christophe Dejours (2011a; 2007). For detailed explanations of “psychodynamics” and of its contribution to a philosophy of work, see Jean-Philippe Deranty (2010; 2009) and Christophe Dejours, Jean-Philippe Deranty (2010). For a detailed presentation from the perspective of critical social theory, see Jean-Philippe Deranty (2011; 2008)

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- ¹² The material resistance is the resistance that reality offers to the action of a subject aiming at accomplishment of the work task. For the distinction of *Arbeit* and *Poïesis*, see Dejours (2009: tome 1). *Arbeit* designates the psychic work in a Freudian sense. By contrast, *poïesis* denotes work as a medium of social reproduction, which Freud neglected according to Dejours.
- ¹³ “(...) pour une part au moins, inaccessibles autrement que par le travail proprement dit et par l’expérience inédite à quoi il peut donner accès” Dejours (2009, tome 1: 72). Thus, work is irreplaceable for constitution of the subject. It does not “constitute one contingent challenge among others for subjectivity”, but rather it is “a necessary condition for the emergence of subjectivity” (Dejours, 2007: 78)
- ¹⁴ The root of Dejours’ conception of the centrality of work in transforming subjectivity is a theory of subject formation he draws from Jean Laplanche. Referring to the latter, Dejours attributes an essential role to the relationship between the newborn and his or her attachment figure. This relationship is of the utmost importance in forming an “erotic body” (different from the biological one) able to feel pleasure, to perceive the multiple aspects of one’s sensibility, and to enhance one’s own subjectivity. See Dejours (2009: tome 1, chapter 4-5). For the theory of the “erotic body” and the formation of subjectivity through the combined action of sexuality and work, see chapters 2 and 3. Dejours contends that, through work, one can enhance (or damage) the sensibility of the “erotic body” he or she formed through childhood interactions with the attachments figure. For the formation of the “erotic body” see also Dejours (2003)
- ¹⁵ “Par l’expérience du travailler, il [celui qui travaille] apprend à connaître ses propres limites, ses maladresses, mais il étend aussi en lui le répertoire de ses impressions affectives et découvre de nouvelles virtuosités (...). car c’est aussi de cette façon que la subjectivité s’accroît, se transforme: par la reconnaissance charnelle du monde et à travers elle par la connaissance de soi. Travailler, ce n’est pas seulement produire, c’est mettre son corps à l’épreuve, avec une chance d’en revenir plus sensibles qu’avant cette épreuve, donc d’accroître ses capacités d’éprouver du plaisir”.
- ¹⁶ Not only cultural recognition of the social function of the subject, but also specific recognition of 1) the technical skills involved in the production processes, and 2) recognition of the beauty and quality of the work product. Only colleagues (whatever their status, peer or senior) who know the job and are able to evaluate it can grant each other this kinds of recognition. See Dejours (2009, tome 2: 36–37, 104–108).
- ¹⁷ See the example p. 169-175, Dejours (2009, tome 1). This “psychic work” can possibly lead to modification of the “organization” of “sexuality”.
- ¹⁸ “the relation with work can be a second chance to overcome the limitations imposed on the development of the erotic body by the fateful ineptitudes of the adult in playing with the baby’s body” (“le rapport au travail peut être une deuxième chance pour dépasser les limites imposées au développement du corps érogène par les inaptitudes funestes de l’adulte à jouer avec le corps de l’enfant”), Dejours (2009, tome 1: 163–164).
- ¹⁹ For Dejours, the “real work organization”, that is, the organization needed to exercise the activity of working and carry out the tasks, is never the one prescribed. The real work organization is always a “compromise” between “labor and management”, thus “a product of social relations”.
- ²⁰ As we have seen, dreaming can be interpreted as part of one’s work (*Arbeit*) insofar as it is indispensable for the subject’s re-elaboration of the difficulties encountered. The same applies to the subject’s life beyond working hours. The “subjectivity as a whole is involved” in work. The “strictly spatial separation, notwithstanding its adoption by classical sociology and psychology, is radically contradicted as soon as the dynamics of the psychic and social processes are taken into account. The working of the psyche cannot be divided up. Persons involved in defensive strategies to combat suffering in work do not leave their psychic behavior in the changing room. On the contrary, they take

their mental constraints with them and need the cooperation of family and friends to keep their defenses ready for when they return to work”. Moreover, it can “be shown that the entire family economy is called upon to help its members face the constraints of the work situation. Nor are children spared by the dynamics of their parents’ relationship to work, to the point that their own development is deeply marked by it, even in the construction of their sexual identity”. (Dejours, 2011a: 249–50)

- ²¹ “S’ils respectent exactement les ordres, dans une obéissance absolue (...) c’est une catastrophe! (...). Et plus rien alors ne fonctionne, la production tombe en panne. Aucune entreprise, aucun atelier ne fonctionne si les opérateurs deviennent obéissants”.
- ²² The connection between political policy and workplace processes seems to be weak, though. Work by itself should facilitate generation of the cooperation necessary to the constitution of an environment that favors *travail vivant*. Its maintenance, however, depends on political will, which does not occur spontaneously. How does one establish such an environment, if the contemporary organization of work hinders the cooperation that should form and support it?
- ²³ As in Honneth's theory, this approach should be relatively neutral regarding the means and the purposes of a struggle aiming at transforming work organization (Honneth, 1995: 162–163, 179). It is up to the individuals' evaluation of what are the (historically changing) presuppositions of a good work environment to decide the forms of a changing praxis as well as the forms of a renewed work organization. With regard to this praxis, however, critical theory should have both a clarifying and a proactive role. It should indicate and analyze social pathologies through normative reconstruction, as Honneth does with his concept of recognition (Honneth 2014). It should also be more audacious, introducing alternatives that are not yet fully elaborated in the social practices and propose them to the public in order to open up debate on their suitability.
- ²⁴ For alienation and reification concerning the non-human environment (external nature), see Angella (submitted manuscript, 2015). On reification, see Angella (2014).

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